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ABSTRACT

Recent literature addressing workplace learning emphasizes the production in late modernity of worker subjectivity as "enterprising self" amid the discourses of flexible specialization in post-Fordist work environments. Extensive critique of these environments has lamented the management of workers' learning and its subversion to organizational goals of material profit and productivity, producing a worker subjectivity as a "bundle of learning needs." The subject is often decentered in a wash of economic, globalization, and lifelong learning discourses. The worker subject must be reclaimed, calling upon a psychoanalytic framework to conceptualize desire and interference at the heart of work where profound pedagogic encounters take place. A pedagogy of desire can be theorized that mobilizes a creative and transgressive impulse that can unfold within and sustain itself alongside the shifting marketplace. This is situated within work environments that can be characterized as "post corporate enterprise culture." This notion builds on well-known models of post-Fordism and reflexive modernization to portray new energies of work that can be perceived to emerge in resistance to the master discourse. That is, it can be seen as economic competition and employee performance and productivity within a neo-liberal framework and one that offers hope through playful, transgressive possibilities. (Contains 19 references.) (YLB)

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Transgressive Possibilities in Post-Corporate Enterprise Culture

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Recent literature addressing workplace learning emphasizes the production in late modernity of worker subjectivity as 'enterprising self', amidst the discourses of flexible specialization in post-Fordist work environments. Extensive critique of these environments has lamented the management of workers' learning and its subversion to organizational goals of material profit and productivity, producing a worker subjectivity as a "bundle of learning needs". The subject is often decentered in a wash of economic, globalization and lifelong learning discourses.

In this paper I argue for a re-claiming of the worker subject, calling upon a psychoanalytic framework to conceptualize desire and interference at the heart of work, where I suggest, profound pedagogic encounters take place. My intent is to theorize a pedagogy of desire, that mobilizes a creative and transgressive impulse which can unfold within and sustain itself alongside the shifting marketplace. My argument is situated within work environments that I characterize as 'post corporate enterprise culture'. This notion builds on well-known models of post-Fordism and reflexive modernization (Beck, 1992; Edwards, 1998) to portray new energies of work which I perceive emerging in resistance to "the master discourse: economic competition and employee performance and productivity within a neo-liberal framework" (Forrester, 1999, p. 194-95), and offering hope through playful, transgressive possibilities.

The Rise Of 'Enterprising Self' As A Dominant Subjectivity In Late Modernity

Critical circles have been addressing with concern the formation in economic late modernity of worker subjectivity as 'enterprising self'. This turn is part of the 'individualization thesis', which is generally associated with Beck's (1992) work in Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity. According to Beck, the emergence of a 'risk society' is accompanied by "a social surge of individualization" (p. 87), where "reflexive modernization dissolves the traditional parameters of industrial society: class culture and consciousness, gender and family roles" (p. 87). That is, individuals confronting the anxieties attending global risk and uncertainty feel compelled to take personal responsibility for choosing and planning their own lives, including their education, careers, identities, and general well-being. Self-discovery and reflection are primary processes in the project of designing one's self and life-path, by choosing and consuming among the myriad choices available in the global marketplace. The risks are both exciting and threatening: tantalizing with fantasies of limitless consumption and identity possibility, balancing high over deep pits of potential economic, environmental, social and personal disasters. Safety nets of community, family, mutual dependencies and social welfare are increasingly eroded in enterprise society. And of course, the nature of risk in choice-making and the availability of choices themselves continue to be distributed unequally along lines of wealth, gender, and other structural dimensions.

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As Edwards (1998) has explained, Giddens (1991) also theorized the late modern self as a 'reflexive project', but argued that reflexivity is integral to modernity. For Giddens, the continuous question of 'How shall I live?' is to be explored by the individual through a range of ambiguous and insecure decisions, mobilizing a wide range of social and psychological information, and creating general existential anxiety: "Living in the risk society means living with a calculative attitude to the open possibilities of action, positive and negative, with which, as individuals and globally, we are confronted in a continuous way in our contemporary social existence" (p. 28).

In the workplace, the double edged conditions of risk and danger have naturalized flexibility in so-called post-Fordist work environments. Edwards (1998) and Garrick and Usher (2000) have shown the impacts on 'hidden curriculum' and individual subjectivities produced in workplaces where flexible workers (responsive, adaptive, transferable), flexible structures (insecure, fluid, adaptive to consumer demand and changing markets), flexible pay (increasingly contractual) and consequently flexible learning are assumed to ensure organizational competitiveness. Edwards (1998) shows how in current regimes of reflexive modernization and flexible specialization, people must construct their own biographies as workers, choosing between different lifestyles, subcultures, social ties, and identities. Workplace 'learning' and capacity-building are focused on 'empowering' the individual as a self-responsible choice-maker, and have been linked to anxieties and choice-making already compelling the individual worker in late modernity: desires for personal development, purpose and fulfillment, meaningful vocation and relationships, creativity, even spiritual growth and happiness. Workers are encouraged to regard as opportunity the increased casualization and temporization of work, and to accept as duty their obligation to continually recreate themselves as a shape-shifting portfolio of capacities that meet unpredictable corporate demand.

For Giddens (1995), the process of reflexive individuation is crucial in this new contractualism, creating general consent for a strong sense of self as autonomous and competitive, and rooted in economic identity as producer and consumer. Organizations, both public and private, desire self-reflexive entrepreneurial workers who thrive on uncertainty, are measured by innovation, and accept responsibility for the risks attending their actions and choices. Thus organizations seek to recruit or create "autonomous, self-regulating, productive individuals . . . [with] energy, initiative, self-reliance and personal responsibility" (Du Gay, 1996, p. 60). Employment is postured as a means to personal fulfillment and self-development.

Thus amidst the discourses of flexibility and individualization, the notion of 'enterprising self' has gained ascendency, particularly in analyses of worker identity. 'Enterprise' refers not only to the priority allocated to commercial enterprise above other forms of organization, but also to 'enterprising' characteristics such as initiative, risk-taking, self-reliance, and self-responsibility. Du Gay (1996) proposes that an 'ethos of enterprise' has pervaded all spheres of our consumerist risk society, such that the dominant project of individuals' lives is constructing and self-regulating their own human capital (their work capacities, biographies and success) in an 'enterprise of the self': "The character of the entrepreneur can no longer be represented as just one amongst a plurality of ethical personalities but must be seen as assuming an ontological priority" (Du Gay, 1996, p. 181). The individual's circumstances are presumed irrelevant, as the enterprise discourse represents all as possessing the desire, capacity, obligation and opportunity to engage the enterprise of reflexively constructing their own human capital.

Material And Cultural Effects Of The 'Enterprising Self' Discourse

Critical analysis of manifestations in education of the 'enterprising self' discourse have focused upon its permeation and repressive effects in lifelong learning (Garrick and Usher, 2000), in teacher identity (Blackmore, 1998), and in schooling and school policy (Smyth, 1999). These and other critics are concerned about the boundaries being blurred between individuals' private spaces of self and soul and

their identities as producers and consumers. Performative skill is the primary currency; efficiency the moral absolute. Human energy is argued to be subordinated to the market, in particular the insatiable appetite of corporations for growth and supremacy. Foucauldian notions of governmentality through self-regulation appear regularly in critiques of workplace subjugation of individuals' capacity: "Through the managerial discourse of 'excellence', technologies of work (power) and technologies of the self (subjectivity) become aligned with technologies of success (motivation and enterprise) such that . . . 'the government of work now passes through the psychological strivings of each and every individual for self-fulfillment'" (Miller and Rose, 1993, cited by Garrick and Usher, 2000).

In workplaces, Garrick and Usher argue that this alignment of individual's aspirations with organizational goals has produced a priority on 'flexible learning' that functions as surveillance. Meanwhile, Du Gay (1996) shows how cultural forms and social institutions are increasingly regulated by the language, priorities and conduct of enterprise. Smyth (1999) argues that entrepreneurism has invaded school policy and curriculum with principles of greed and short-term material measures of success. And Blackmore (1998) claims that work has taken primacy in life, subsuming all other priorities (family, community) in determining what activity has moral worth and what knowledge is legitimate. Smyth (1999) generally attacks the turn to enterprise culture as triumphal individualist economic rationalism threatening democratic, civic-minded community. The problem is that fundamental systemic inequities, constraints, and contradictions persist. In technologies regulating the enterprising self (such as learning organization initiatives) these are normalized and projected onto the individual, and represented as conditions of risk and personal responsibility in which one must choose wisely, or perish.

Turning from cultural effects of enterprise discourse in general terms, one obvious material effect has been increasing preoccupation in North America with actual self-employment or "me, inc." as a way of life. This is a logical consequence of at least four forces: (1) job loss through economic restructuring, (2) a career discourse emphasizing individual responsibility for seeking meaningful, lucrative work, (3) images romanticizing personal freedom and fulfillment in home-based business and business ownership, and (4) new opportunities (especially in internet enterprise) availing business start-up to individuals in wide variety of age, culture, class, bodily, geographic, and other categories of potential inequity and disadvantage. Certainly in Canada, interest in entrepreneurism receives special focus in many sectors (post-retirement start-ups, dot-com ventures, women entrepreneurs, youth moguls) and educational efforts (government and banking programs, media glory-stories, and K-12 school curricula). The result, predictably, has been a surge in new business start-up. In particular, women's business start-ups in North America have risen dramatically in the past decade, doubling the rate of men's (Industry Canada, 1999; NFWBO, 1999).

As I have shown elsewhere (Fenwick, 2000), these self-employed individuals certainly are imbricated in discourses of competitive self-managed individualism emphasizing unlimited material growth and profit. However a closer look reveals that within these discourses there is considerable resistance. Entrepreneurism is not unitary. Furthermore, the very energies animating enterprise culture i.e., producing active, self-responsible subjectivities that corporate organizations attempt to regulate, can be observed to have enabled individual refusal of corporate subjugation, and exploration of transgressive spaces. Two examples: significant numbers of individuals are leaving organizations to start their own firms (Sharp and Sharp, 1999), and individuals within organizations are actively subverting 'empowerment' efforts to shape them as loyal entrepreneurial employees (Parker and Slaughter, 1994). My focus is the former group.

Post-Corporate Enterprise Culture - Site For Transgression

In my own study of individual women who had left jobs in (corporate) organizations to start businesses[1], about two-thirds had left unhappily, citing reasons of serious ethical conflicts, lack of

recognition and creative opportunity. Almost all had decided to start their own business partly as an opportunity to "do it my way": they described desires to live out a creative dream, create their own work environments, contribute meaningfully to their communities, but mostly to obtain more personal flexibility and control over their work and lives . Desire was, therefore, an important focus in their conceptualizations of themselves in the business of enterprise. My question is: Are there new spaces enabling truly insurgent possibilities for work, learning and identity through the creation of enterprise?

Michelson (1999) proposes that cultural hegemony never can fully contain insurgent, unmanageable experience. In fact, she maintains that despite attempts of capitalist society to organize and produce identities normalized according to enterprise ethos, transgressive possibilities persist in human hunger for and promise of a realm of 'authentic life': "a realm of sensuous, material and relational activity in which a bracing chaos obtains." Michelson borrows the metaphor of 'carnival' from Bakhtin to represent the insurgency of 'the excess of experience'- those playful sites of embodied, communal, celebratory and incoherent experience that defy disciplinary boundaries, stable meanings and repressed identities. These sites are irrepressible: "the transgressive is the surfeit of experience after all authorized meanings have been exhausted, 'the excess that enable and contests every performance' and affirms the unruly intractable element in experience" (1999, p. 149).

Turning back to my study, one central finding amidst multiple contradictions and difference enacted by individual entrepreneurs, was the attempt by many to position themselves resistantly to conventional models of competitive 'corporate' entrepreneurism emphasizing profit, size and growth. Many described struggles to craft alternate models of work and enterprise within discourses of economic rationalism and gendered neo-liberal individualism: to create nourishing workplace communities; to commit to sustainability before expansion; to honor 'right relationships' before competition; and to uphold ethical integrity before profit. An unexpected finding was the deliberate breaking of conventional business 'rules' by new entrepreneurs. Significant numbers of these individuals refused to write a business plan delineating financial objectives, competitors and market share. Many set prices according to alternate considerations besides maximizing profit. Several maintained activities that did not contribute directly or indirectly to business productivity; or chose decidedly 'inefficient' approaches to business development and operation. Many, instead of expanding their business when desire for their services grew, chose to contract and focus only on activities from which they derived personal gratification. Some drew only small personal income from the business even after several years of operation. Several maintained interdependent alliances with so-called competitors (Fenwick and Hutton, 2000). Yet their business remained viable, in that it had survived and supported themselves, their employees, and their

Here is what appears to be a different enterprise culture, what I choose to call 'post-corporate', that may challenge the subjugation of humanity to material markers of success and size. Others such as Hawken (1993) and Korten (1999) have offered evidence of this transgressive behavioral shift away from traditional models of corporate entrepreneurism. The characteristics of this post-corporate enterprise culture include the active, self-managing, risk-taking virtues associated with the 'enterprising self' described by du Gay (1996). However, here we see individuals deliberately disconnecting from a fundamental motive of material consumption for its own sake, and resisting consent to norms of competitive relations and unmitigated growth. In other words, the distinguishing dimension is possibly a moral one. Many have already expressed their loss of faith with workplace organizations and their cultural hegemony in their performance of "dropping out" of formal employment. Their own business is often energized by this resistance: "I want to do things my way for a change"; "The day this stops being fun is the day I stop doing it." And in that refusal of participation with corporate competition that reifies a so-called inevitable globalized market and individualism, some new entrepreneurs appear to find their own spaces. Their agency may be constructed through the 'enterprising self' discourse, but in pursuing

desire for the control of their lives at least some learn to believe that they can choose the networks in which they will participate - including networks of knowledge and authority, social relations, cultural discourses, and economic imperatives.

A second important finding was the dramatic personal transformation, empowerment and even joy reported by many participants and attributed to their enterprise experiences. Many emphasized 'passion' and 'fun' echoing Michelson's (1999) notion of transgressive possibilities of latter-day Bakhtinian carnival. Passion alludes to ecstasy - uncontained, unmanageable, irrational, and potentially violent. In using such language, women resist bodiless, abstract versions of knowledge and work, and models of business that distance the owner-manager from the activity of the enterprise. As noted above, these individuals also frequently demonstrated choices which, within master economic discourses of productivity, would represent the unreasonable, the incoherent, the passionate. And many declared an urge or press, sometimes "voracious", to continually seek new encounters in relationships, challenging projects, and creative problems - and to seek self-knowledge. These encounters are fundamentally as much about learning as they are about performance or production, marked by the same courage of invention faced in the pedagogic encounter that Martusewicz (1997) describes: "Standing at the edge of the unthought, even the unasked, and always the unsaid, is the moment of choosing" (p. 111). Risk encounters where learning, work and enterprise are enmeshed with the 'reflexive self' project can be illuminated by examining issues of desire.

Desire And Transgression In Enterprise

The notion of "living your dream" captures a dynamic of fantasy and self-creation that illustrates an ellipse of desire. An entrepreneur conjures a vision of something unprecedented, with no specific signifiers although fashioned from a pool of culturally-available images. The entrepreneur must believe the legitimacy of its possibility and persuade others, then inaugurate this invention in a creative process that assumes its own direction. As the process unfolds and loops back to the dreamer, he or she must continually find/refine language to sustain its actuality, and adjust to the changing shape of a self emerging as an indistinguishable part of this enterprise.

Enterprise purposes seemed to emerge over long periods through gradual discernment and clarification. Many individuals learned to navigate the changing points of confluence where their own and others' desires met: "figuring out what it is I want" (the work activity that is creatively challenging, holds meaning, and affirms an identity that gives joy), naming and refusing what one doesn't want, and determining which among these is marketable to others' demands. Coming to this point of 'clarifying my desire' requires knowledge that one has permission and possibility to direct one's work guided by personal desire. Other knowledge and skill required to conduct the enterprise are fluid, not substantive 'human capital' that can be transferred from one situation to the next. Thus work and knowledge seem entwined in an essential metaphor of creation that involve but do not necessarily serve labor, production, and acquisition. A whole new sphere of activity, relational networks, and desires leading to new understandings emerge around the individual's imagination; at the same time, she comes into presence as a fluid and continually evolving self.

From this perspective desire is not a simple longing for pleasure or fantasy, but a learned assertion of the legitimacy of desire to reject a perpetual human capital project (the enterprising self) and seek immersion in fulfilling work for its own sake. These entrepreneurs also assert, in a desire to desire their own work, the imbrication of their own being with the object of their desire. To sustain love the desire must never become exhausted; so, work and knowledge are continually created, the object is continually out of reach. The object is not an ontological lack, but an assertion emerging from the individual's own being-in-activity. As Martusewicz (1997) observes, "Part of the desire that pushes me to ask about this world, that pushes me to that precipice, is a desire to understand myself in this world -- the desire (and anxiety) to face the other that both is and is not 'me'". Through enterprise individuals may learn the

possibility and permission to seek the challenges of perpetual difficulty that they love, to make up their own work and knowledge in these conflicts, to name their own know-how, to decide by their own convictions, and to serve their own desires as worthwhile and morally good.

I would argue that within this site lie rich areas for exploration. What dynamics of longing are constituted in the conflicting images of post-Fordist enterprise culture? How and where do transgressive desires emerge in the cultural imaginary amidst the hegemonic enterprise ethos? How are these desires enmeshed in individuals' processes of reflexive self-construction? What possibilities are thus configured for individual workers' participation in new knowledges and forms of work? Questions like these enable a more complex analysis of the subjectivity of workers -- who are too often cast as oppressed learning creatures: knowledge-producers and regulated subjects of their 'workplace' and its discursive practices such as learning technologies. For those committed to action for social justice and a belief in human agency, such inquiry may offer hope for resistance to "the managerial discourse of 'excellence', technologies of work and technologies of self becoming aligned with technologies of success". It also may help interrupt a scholarly tendency to simplify and totalize "enterprise culture" as a nasty monolithic handmaiden of globalized corporate capitalism.

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Footnotes

[1] Findings mentioned in this paper are drawn from a national multi-year study conducted by a team involving the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary, and funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. In-depth interviews were conducted with one hundred ten women who had left organizational jobs to pursue self-employment in various forms and regions. Participants narrated their challenges and strategies developed in action, the knowledge they valued most, and their understanding of the process of its development. Various reports of study methods and findings are available at http://www.ualberta.ca/~tfenwick/index.htm.
These people are not just the affluent middle class exercising the luxury of seeking meaningful vocation. Thirty-one percent were single mothers. Twenty-two percent did not have any post secondary education, and of these two claimed self-employment to be the only means to earning a 'decent salary' to support themselves and their families.

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